DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 332 CE 081 109

TITLE	Career Development of Under-Employed Graduates. NICEC Briefing.
INSTITUTION	National Inst. for Careers Education and Counselling, Cambridge (England).
PUB DATE	2000-06-00
NOTE	7p.; "In association with Leeds Careers Guidance."
AVAILABLE FROM	National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX, England.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Action Research; *Adult Counseling; Adult Learning; Adult Programs; Career Counseling; *Career Development; *Career Education; Career Guidance; Change Strategies; *College Graduates; Counseling Services; *Education Work Relationship; Employment Patterns; Employment Problems; Employment Services; Evening Programs; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Internet; Labor Force Development; Labor Utilization; Material Development; Mentors; Partnerships in Education; Peer Counseling; Policy Formation; Portfolios (Background Materials); Postsecondary Education; Private Sector; Program Development; Program Implementation; Public Policy; School Business Relationship; Secondary Education; Social Support Groups; Transitional Programs; *Underemployment; Work Experience; Work Experience Programs; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	*England (Leeds)

ABSTRACT

The Leeds Under-Employed Graduates project was developed to assist higher education (HE) graduates living or working in Leeds, England, who encountered difficulty in establishing themselves in the local labor market. The main project activities were as follows: (1) services for graduates (including graduate career development workshops, assistance with compiling career development portfolios, provision of individual mentors, and open evenings providing peer support opportunities); (2) private sector recruitment and employment services; and (3) local labor market research. Twelve factors inhibiting progression from HE into the labor market and 6 factors encouraging progression were identified through feedback provided by the 268 graduates who made contact with the Leeds project. The graduates' feedback and experiences also revealed the following areas of local- and national-level practice and policy where appropriate action could help lessen the risk of wasting graduates' skills and abilities and could enable graduates to begin the career development process: pre-HE and post-HE careers education and guidance; work experience and career development; work-related learning; mentoring; recruitment and employment services; guidance and the Internet; action research; and information, advice, and guidance partnerships. The project's achievements have been substantial in terms of the practical help and support offered to local graduates. (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

NICEC

Briefing

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. G. Watts

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

ED 448 332

U S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Career Development of Under-Employed Graduates

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LEEDS CAREERS GUIDANCE

Leeds Careers Guidance is a limited company formed through a partnership of public-sector and private organisations. It is responsible for the provision of the Careers Service within Leeds, under contract to the Department for Education and Employment. It also provides a range of related services and products for young people, adults and employing organisations.

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation initiated and supported by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment. CRAC has sponsored NICEC since 1975.

Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX
Tel: 01223-460277 Fax: 01223-311708
E-mail: enquiries@crac.org.uk Web site: www.crac.org.uk

FO81109

Substantial numbers of recent graduates are encountering difficulties in utilising their talents in the labour market, and in developing their careers. The Leeds Under-Employed Graduates Project was one of eight 'Guidance for Graduates' projects to pilot methods of extending and enhancing career-development support for such graduates.

This Briefing, drawn from the Leeds project, identifies:

- factors that inhibit or encourage graduate progression;
- recent graduates' guidance requirements;
- implications for national policy.

The Briefing has been written by Geoff Ford (NICEC Fellow) in association with Leeds Careers Guidance.

THE PROJECT

OBJECTIVES

The Leeds Under-Employed Graduates project – 'GiG' (Graduate Information and Guidance) – was developed to assist graduates living or working in Leeds and encountering difficulty in establishing themselves in the local labour market. The project targeted graduates up to 5 years after graduation, with no upward age limit.

Local labour market research showed that many graduates in Leeds were having difficulty in identifying suitable employment opportunities, and significant numbers were starting their careers through 'temping'. Many of the temporary placements were with small and medium-sized employers (SMEs). The project aimed to help 'under-employed' graduates to utilise their potential more quickly through progression into 'graduate-level' employment, and to begin to maximise the contribution they could make to the local and national economy.

GiG was planned as a network project between: Leeds Careers Guidance (the lead partner); the local Higher Education Careers Advisory Services (HECASs) – the University of Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University, and Trinity and All Saints College; the Open University Counselling Service; Leeds Training and Enterprise Council; and private-sector recruitment and employment services (RESs).

PROJECT CONTENT AND DELIVERY

Graduates

- ***Graduate career-development workshops*** (4 sessions of 3 hours each, arranged over 4 weeks). These enabled participants to: review their life and work experiences; identify their skills and values; establish careers direction (life and work); and strengthen their ability to cope positively with life changes, including career change. Graduate feedback showed that the workshops helped many participants to regain self-confidence and lost motivation, and to develop and begin to implement personal action plans.
- ***The Career Development Portfolio***. This enabled graduates to build up a file of local and national resource material to help them become more self-reliant in managing their own career. In particular, graduates appreciated the information on the local guidance network, guidance-related websites, job-search skills including interview technique and CV preparation, and employers' expectations of graduate applicants.
- Documentation to help graduates ***record their own progress and developing skill-base*** while 'temping'.
- ***An individual mentor***. For many graduates, the group workshops and individual mentoring constituted a continuum.
- ***Open evenings***, organised on subjects requested by graduates (e.g. effective CV preparation; local labour market; graduate work experience). These meetings enabled some graduates to build on the peer support developed in the workshops.

Private-Sector Recruitment and Employment Services

- ***A training programme in guidance and mentoring skills for front-line RES staff working with graduates***, with accreditation towards CAMPAG NVQ3 in Guidance.
- ***A Mentor Support Pack*** outlining the role and contributions of mentors, and providing information on the local guidance partnership including career resources.
- Development of a ***local Quality Award for RESs*** offering enhanced support to graduates.

Local Labour Market Research

A ***wide-ranging graduate labour-market report*** was prepared with feedback from a variety of local employers, including many SMEs. Key findings included:

- The majority of employers employing graduates in clerical, personal service, sales and unskilled jobs considered them 'under-employed'.
- Many local employers were mainly interested in graduates who had: computer, analytical and design skills; specialist expertise such as consultancy and product development; and scientific, engineering and medical qualifications.
- Employers who already employed graduates were more likely to employ them in the future. It helped if the person recruiting staff was also a graduate.
- SMEs had little if any knowledge about national and local HE graduate career-development initiatives. However, the survey showed that a number of local employers were interested in developing closer links with HE in such areas as: HE-delivered management development programmes; specialist short courses; and IT training for existing staff.
- Many employers strongly supported more graduate work-experience and placement schemes; these were also seen as an important recruitment mechanism.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

COMMON EXPERIENCES

268 graduates made contact with the Leeds project. They provided a rich source of feedback on their experience of leaving HE and entering – or seeking to enter – the labour market.

FACTORS INHIBITING PROGRESSION

- *Lack of career direction.* A high proportion of graduates lacking career direction had non-vocational, arts and social-science degrees. However, some graduates with vocationally-specific degrees also required career guidance, for reasons including loss of interest in their specialisation and local shortages of career opportunities in their subject areas.
- *Poor self-confidence and loss of motivation*, intensified by employer rejections and their perceived inability to obtain 'graduate-level' jobs.
- *Inadequate job-search and career management skills.* Frequent problems were difficulties in writing effective CVs, and poor self-presentation and interview skills.
- *A sense of isolation after leaving HE.* Career and labour-market difficulties often had to be confronted alone and without ready access to experienced and informed support.
- *Apparent lack of interest and sympathy shown by many local helping agencies*, including public and private job agencies. In particular, graduates were critical of unhelpful and unwelcoming reception arrangements.
- *Perceived prejudice by some employers against graduates.* Graduates reported that some employers stereotyped them as 'inexperienced', 'academic', and having 'wrong attitudes' towards work. Mature graduates felt that SMEs sometimes saw them as a threat.
- *Actual or assumed age demarcations, especially affecting mature graduates.* Mature graduates were concerned that employers with graduate training schemes often recruited from relatively narrow age bands (e.g. 21-23). Mature graduates can also encounter age barriers in entering professional posts (e.g. teaching, where younger candidates are cheaper).
- *Frustration with 'temping'*, which often seemed to lack any sense of career direction or purpose.
- *Little if any knowledge of the objectives, processes and purposes of recording personal achievement*, and of the transferability of skills and experience.
- *Lack of interest and career support in the workplace.* Many graduates reported inadequate career development and training by employers affecting all staff, especially in firms where prospects were limited (e.g. call centres which employ substantial numbers of graduates on relatively routine duties).
- *Insufficient knowledge and experience within SMEs about graduate training processes and methods.* Graduates reported instances of actual and comparative isolation in the workplace, even where employers regularly recruited graduates. Problems included: insufficient interest and support; and limited opportunities to discuss career-development issues with responsible management.
- *Concerns about finance, especially student debt.* Significant numbers of graduates were reluctant to increase their level of debt by taking postgraduate courses, including those leading to professional qualifications.

These difficulties affected other areas of graduates' lives. The feedback suggested that some graduates experience significant, and occasionally acute, levels of social exclusion – vocational, emotional and financial.

FACTORS ENCOURAGING PROGRESSION

- *The capacity of well-planned graduate career-development programmes to restore self-confidence.* Key elements included: the content and quality of delivery; individual mentoring; peer support; and the discovery that other graduates shared similar problems.
- *A strong motivation to succeed* and to implement career action plans, once career direction had been established.
- *A desire to undertake short vocationally-oriented courses in order to improve employability, especially those which improve ICT skills and experience.* This contrasted with the reluctance of some graduates to increase their debt levels by taking postgraduate courses.
- *Understanding of the process and value of systematically recording personal achievement*, even though graduates required continuous encouragement to maintain the necessary discipline.
- *A genuine interest in, and willingness to undertake, voluntary work.* In addition to the community benefits and personal rewards, graduates appreciated that the additional experience could enrich personal portfolios and consequent transferability across vocational areas.
- *Marked ability to analyse conditions and situations in their own workplaces*, irrespective of their work responsibilities and status, or whether in temporary or permanent employment. Graduates invariably showed a keen understanding of workplace issues, and of ways in which employers could increase employee and company productivity. Graduates' analytical abilities were often insufficiently recognised and utilised by many employers, to the possible detriment of company efficiency and profitability.

The vast majority of graduates expressed a strong desire for local career-development programmes to become permanent features of local provision for graduates. Graduates were deeply concerned about the potential waste of their own and other graduates' abilities, for reasons that included the widespread lack of skilled support on career development and guidance issues after graduates leave HE and enter the labour market.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Graduate feedback and experience identified a number of areas of practice and policy at both local and national levels where appropriate action could help to:

- lessen the risk of wasting graduate skills and abilities;
- enable graduates to begin the process of developing, and gradually optimising, the contributions they could make to local labour markets.

CAREERS EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE: PRE-HE

Graduates generally perceived CEG provision for more able school and college students as deficient and under-developed, although there were examples of good practice.

Feedback indicated that CEG was often concentrated on the mechanics of HE entry, without sufficient attention also being given to other aspects of HE decision-making. Missing or under-explored elements could include: the financial implications of degree choice; the vocational implications of degree choice, including the employability of specific degree subjects; the place of post-graduate courses in attaining career plans; and employer expectations of graduates. Labour market information appeared not to be systematically utilised at sixth-form and equivalent level, nor related to subject choice. Few graduates had been encouraged to research HE options systematically, including the career implications, while at school, although some graduates had used the internet for this purpose.

Some graduates considered that the process of systematically recording personal achievement should commence at school, so that the disciplines and understanding are already in place when students enter HE institutions and subsequently the labour market. There are important implications here for use of the DfEE's Progress File with more able students, once the piloting stage is complete and the File is more widely available.

The feedback from graduates reinforces the crucial importance of ensuring that high-quality CEG provision is available for students planning to enter HE. Some of the issues on which graduates wanted assistance in the Leeds career-development workshops are – or should be – basic to school CEG programmes.

Well-informed and carefully-considered HE and career decisions can: reduce the risk of future graduate under-employment; improve graduates' chances of achieving personal fulfilment; and improve the return on the nation's investment in HE. Currently there are strong indications that the quality of CEG for more able students may be declining. There is an urgent need for a national review of the quality and comprehensiveness of school- and college-based careers education and guidance available to students planning to enter HE.

> 'I think that a lot of graduates leave university with little idea of what they want to do. I feel this is because of a general inadequacy in careers guidance from an early age.'

CAREERS EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE: POST-HE

Many graduates reported that they had made little use of HE careers advisory services as undergraduates, and had delayed career decisions until after they had taken their degrees. After leaving HE, when the realities of the situation meant they were 'guidance-ready', they found they were unable to obtain the in-depth guidance they required except from their own HEI (although they were able to use the career resources of other HECASs and gain 'front-line' advice through the AGCAS Mutual Aid Scheme). Many also required guidance on repaying debt and other financial problems.

The feedback reinforced the need for guidance provision after graduating. Graduates also favoured career-development workshops (such as GiG) integrated into the undergraduate curriculum; recording-achievement programmes which counted towards their degrees; and structured work-experience and placement schemes.

Graduate experience and feedback highlights the need for an urgent review of those factors (including resource constraints) that prevent HECASs from extending in-depth guidance to graduates who are not alumni; this includes graduates who return to their home area or move to locations which are perceived as offering a range of 'graduate-level' opportunities. Strategies need to be developed to surmount these difficulties.

> 'In my experience the gap that occurs after you have left university cannot be emphasised enough. There's hardly any personal help available after graduation. There's no interest from tutors and nobody to talk to about the difficulties you can face.'

WORK EXPERIENCE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Many graduates entering the Leeds project were still at the exploratory stage of career development. A high proportion wanted opportunities for planned work experience in occupational and sector areas of personal interest. In particular, they wanted to:

- gain 'hands on' experience in a range of work operations;
- undertake projects that would benefit the employer and enable them to demonstrate their own skills and potential.

Graduates, project partners and many local employers saw an expansion of Graduate Apprenticeships, and of Graduate Gateway, Teaching Company and equivalent initiatives, as a main way of counteracting graduate under-employment.

The Leeds experience indicated that strategically-planned local partnership approaches could significantly increase the impact of graduate career-development initiatives involving employers.

> 'It's difficult to move from being a student to being an employee. Nationally I think students all find it difficult when they graduate to go back home, and to connect into the workplace as successfully as they had hoped.'

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

Graduates favoured short specific courses, especially those related to ICT which they saw as particularly helpful in securing employment. A significant number of graduates were reluctant to apply for postgraduate study for full-time qualifications because of the financial implications.

There are serious issues here. For many graduates the first degree is an essential step towards professional qualifications; reluctance to continue studies to postgraduate or professional level because of the increased debt could – if the trend continues – become a principal reason for graduate under-employment.

For many graduates (and especially those with fewer financial resources), there may need to be a significant switch from full-time to part-time and work-based postgraduate courses to enable them to gain professional qualifications.

'Graduates need "back-up" qualifications in IT. If their courses are not IT-oriented, and they have not taken a vocational degree, they are at a disadvantage in the job market. They need to be made aware of this.'

'Student debts are very much an issue in planning work after university. After university many graduates find themselves in the position of having to settle for a job they would not see as a step forward, in order to get some money in. This may interrupt the plans they had while they were studying.'

MENTORING

Graduates who progress directly from HE into 'graduate-level' training schemes normally have access to staff with a direct interest in their welfare and progress. Graduates who, for various reasons, do not progress directly into 'graduate-level' jobs, and who need time to establish career direction, also need personal and vocationally-oriented interest and support.

The Leeds project is one of a number of HE initiatives which have highlighted the critically-important contribution that skilled individual mentors (guidance and work-based) can make in helping many more graduates to realise their economic and social potential. Feedback shows that many graduates place a high value on ready access to skilled, caring and sympathetic mentors who can:

- provide a source of motivation, and a springboard for further action;
- help graduates to determine and review individual action plans, and to structure their job-search and career-development activities;
- enable graduates to identify their own skills and potential, including identification of the (often unrecognised) skills and experience they have acquired while 'temping';
- assist and coach graduates in such areas as CV preparation, interview technique and personal presentation;
- provide expert information on the local labour market;
- refer graduates to other appropriate contacts in local employment and guidance networks;
- help to cut through the isolation and to create sense and purpose out of personal situations which previously seemed negative.

'Having a mentor makes a big difference. They provide support, guidance, and encouragement. You know the mentor is really interested, and is working for you.'

'The most helpful part of GiG has been having my own mentor. Although I still have quite a way to go, she has helped to motivate me and build my confidence that there actually are opportunities out there for graduates.'

'The mentor reinforced my ideas and gave me the confidence to say "Look! I can do this!"'

'My mentor managed to draw out skills I hadn't recognised myself.'

RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Many recently-qualified graduates in Leeds and elsewhere make extensive use of private-sector RESs. In some cases graduates use 'temping' to accumulate 'shop-floor' experience in particular fields (e.g. finance, marketing). Sometimes temporary placements resulted in permanent offers. However, for many graduates 'temping' is a 'last-resort' and unstructured experience. The majority consider 'temping' as a waste of their true abilities and potential, and of state and individual investment in HE.

The Leeds project piloted approaches which, if more widely adopted and expanded, might enable 'temping' to provide a more structured career-development route for graduates. Approaches included: methods to systematically record vocational experience and achievement; training for front-line RES staff in basic mentoring, guidance and referral skills; and the establishment of closer links between the local adult guidance partnership and local RES companies (and their professional body, the Recruitment and Employment Confederation).

Wider-scale adoption by RESs of these and other approaches depends on RES management perceiving commercial benefits for their companies in graduate career development. The Leeds project showed that, as yet, few RES managers have identified a new market for 'career management services... that... will be more than the conventional employment agency, offering access to jobs, to guidance, to training and development, to pension provision, perhaps to mortgage finance or total packages of social insurance' (Bayliss, V.: *Redefining Work*. London: RSA, 1998).

However, the Leeds project also indicated that an important market niche may be developing for career management services providing a wider range of support services to graduates and other sectors of local communities. For example, this was apparent in the need many graduates had for career-development support, and in employer interest in externally co-ordinated graduate work-placement schemes.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Guidance and the Internet

The internet contains a wealth of guidance and job-search-related information relevant to graduates - provided they first know where to look. Leeds partners prepared a graduate guide to local and national sources of information and guidance, including relevant websites; this was welcomed and extensively used by many graduates.

ICT offers considerable potential to extend the range of help available to graduates on career guidance and career-development issues. For example, Leeds has developed an on-line version of its Career Development Portfolio. Initiatives such as Yorkshire and Humberside's 'Graduate Link' are showing the value of the web in providing regularly updated vacancy and labour market information.

There could real opportunities here for Local Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships. However, experience shows that ICT complements and extends the work of guidance workers, and does not substitute for them. The Leeds project suggests this is also true for graduates. More research is required to illuminate the extent to which career information and guidance delivered on-line can be effective as a 'stand-alone' resource, and where one-to-one and group mentoring is required to provide focus, motivation, incentive, advice, guidance and individual support.

Action Research

The Leeds project is one of several initiatives that has cast doubt on the shorter-term value of HE as an economic investment for a proportion of graduates. More information is required to determine the extent to which this may also apply in the longer term.

Regularly updated information is also required at national and local level on: the extent of graduate unemployment and under-employment; barriers to career progression; and the application and appropriateness of graduate skills. The increased cost of HE to the community and to individuals means that much more needs to be known. Individuals are required to invest heavily in their own HE, but often without sufficient information on the returns.

As the numbers of students entering HE continue to increase, so the need to produce regularly reviewed and updated answers to these questions becomes more pressing. Initiatives such as the Leeds project provide access to a wide range of local data on graduate career development. In Leeds this information has been collated and stored on a well-designed database which might provide the basis for a national exemplar.

Selected data on graduate career development should be systematically collected at national level – including across all relevant DfEE-funded HE projects – and used to inform HE policy formation, including the 'pay-back' potential of individual investment in HE.

Graduate tracking and action-research initiatives are also needed at national and local level to identify blockages to graduate progression (e.g. mismatches between graduate skills and employer requirements, inadequate employer attention to graduate career development) and ways of overcoming these.

Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships

In most areas Local IAG Partnerships would seem the most appropriate frameworks to oversee the development of career guidance for graduates. In many areas (as in Leeds) HECASs are members of IAG partnerships. Guidance for graduates and other adult target groups may be best delivered by a number of local partners working together, possibly from centrally-located and readily accessible 'shop-front' premises. Some IAG partnerships may also be well placed to influence career-development support for graduates, including initiatives involving employers.

Many under-employed graduates have deep-seated guidance requirements, and often do not know where to turn for help. There are important challenges here for local IAG Partnerships.

Conclusion

The Leeds project brought together a large number of graduates experiencing varying degrees of difficulty in establishing themselves in the labour market of one large and reasonably representative city. For all of these graduates, the initial hope of finding a 'graduate-level' job was proving illusory. Employer-based career-development opportunities appeared to be scarce, or indeed non-existent. Many were losing confidence, not only in the labour market but in themselves. For these graduates the project provided an oasis within which they could find support and begin the process of restoring their self-belief and sense of purpose.

The achievements of the Leeds project, and of equivalent initiatives in other areas, have been substantial in terms of the practical help and support offered to graduates. However, the projects are normally short-term. Longer-term career-development solutions are required to ensure that a higher proportion of graduates are able to utilise their skills and abilities more fully in local labour markets, so that entry into HE represents an investment in which all interested parties can have confidence.

Further Information

Copies of the final Project and Evaluation Reports on the Leeds Under-Employed Graduates Project can be obtained from: Leeds Careers Guidance, 1 Eastgate, Leeds LS2 7LY (tel. 0113-225-9000, fax. 0113-225-9090). The Evaluation Report, *Career Guidance and Development for Under-Employed Graduates*, considers the local and national implications of the initiative, and contains detailed feedback from graduates.

Additional copies of this Briefing are available from Leeds Careers Guidance or from NICEC (Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX) on receipt of an A4 stamped (32p for one or two copies, 39p for up to four copies, 46p for up to six copies) and addressed envelope.